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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TBIO](#) [SOCI](#) [AMED](#) [MU](#)  
SUBJECT: OMANI HEALTH MINISTER: AIDS CASES UNDER CONTROL

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) The Ministry of Health recently announced to the media that as a result of its awareness efforts, the government had controlled the spread of HIV. While describing the country as low risk, the Ministry is nevertheless focusing on promoting HIV awareness among the young, as well as monitoring drug use and the limited sex trade. According to Ministry records, Omanis infected with HIV are predominantly males in the 25-49 age bracket. Expatriate HIV records are not published, and those detected are deported without treatment. End Summary.

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Under Control  
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¶2. (U) On April 6, Health Minister Dr. Ali bin Muhammad bin Musa told Arabic-language daily "al-Shabiba" that the government has "managed to contain the spread" of HIV as a result of the Ministry's efforts to educate and raise awareness among Omanis on the subject through an AIDS control program established in 1987. (Note: The first HIV case was registered with the Ministry in 1984. End Note.) Through this program, the Ministry has encouraged Omanis at risk to get tested and seek treatment by stressing that records would be handled confidentially. The government also has promoted the benefits of treatment options for those potentially infected with HIV.

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Educating Youth  
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¶3. (C) Dr. Ali Ahmed Salim BaOmar, Head of AIDS Prevention Department, Ministry of Health, echoed the minister's comments in a follow-up conversation with Econoff on April 14. BaOmar stated that the government, under its "National Strategic Plan" launched in December 2007, has reinforced its AIDS awareness program by taking a "multi-sectoral" approach. Though characterizing Oman as a "low risk, low prevalence" country, BaOmar nevertheless stated that the Ministry was closely watching the incidences of HIV cases among younger Omanis, especially those still in school. He identified cultural norms that discourage male/female interaction outside the family until marriage, which he claimed led to higher risk same-sex intercourse, and negative attitudes towards condom use as causes for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among the young. He added that the stigma that society attaches to those who contract STDs hinders Ministry prevention efforts, as many are still wary of coming forward to seek treatment.

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Concerns over Prostitution and Needle Sharing  
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14. (C) BaOmar continued that with the opening of the country to greater numbers of foreign visitors, the presence of expatriate sex workers had become a concern for the Ministry.

He noted that from his interviews with prostitutes detained by the Royal Oman Police, AIDS awareness levels varied significantly by country. (Note: Prostitution is illegal in Oman and foreign sex workers are usually quickly deported after arrest. End Note.) Chinese sex workers, for example, exhibited high degrees of awareness regarding STDs and therefore demanded that clients wear condoms. Young Moroccan prostitutes, by contrast, had much lower levels of awareness about the risks of unprotected sex, and often chose to make more money by not requiring condom use. In addition to the limited sex trade, BaOmar cited the transiting of drugs through Oman as another Ministry concern. He identified Oman's prison population as an increasingly high-risk group, given the prevalence of needle-sharing among inmates using drugs.

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Statistical Snapshot  
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15. (U) Since 1986, the Ministry has kept statistics on the number of AIDS cases by sex and age, though the figures represent only the number of Omanis registered by primary health clinics. Of the 1,539 cases reported from 1986 to 2006, 1,132 were males (73%), while 407 were females. By age, 985 cases (64%) were reported in the 25-49 bracket, followed by 265 cases (17%) in the 15-24 bracket, and 159 cases (10%) in the 50 and over age bracket. The Ministry reported that twelve newborns were registered with HIV. BaOmar estimated that the Ministry registers about 100 new Omani cases per year.

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Expats Deported  
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16. (C) While the Ministry of Health maintains records for expatriates infected with STDs, it does not report their HIV registration rates. BaOmar believed that between 70 and 80 expatriate HIV cases are reported to the Ministry each year, usually as a by-product of required employment examinations. He added, with concern, that the government did not provide treatment for expatriates infected with HIV; they are immediately repatriated to their country of origin instead. He suggested that providing counseling for expatriates with HIV could be done as a joint initiative between the Ministry and foreign diplomatic missions.

GRAPPO